

Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.



100th Communications Squadron (Brad Fallin)

# Resourcing the Force

## The Legacy of Cold War Strategy

By RONALD W. MOORE

**T**hroughout the Clinton administration critics have bemoaned shortfalls in resources relative to national strategy and force structure. A lapse in acquisition is frustrating recapitalization efforts and depleting the operations and maintenance account through unprecedented levels of deployment. Some estimate that both the Bottom-Up Review and the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) force

structures were underfunded by as much as \$30 billion per year.

The gap between strategy and resources prompted a lively critique of an administration lacking a national security vision. The Clinton approach perpetuated a grand strategy dating back to World War II. Moreover this strategy will guide security policy into the next administration and, together with emerging domestic and international trends, perpetuate a mismatch for the foreseeable future. This will result in both the frequent use of military force in limited-objective interventions and increasing tension in civil-military relations.

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## The Mismatch

The principal factor which contributed to a disconnect between strategy and resources during the current administration is an expansive idea of national security interests together with a mandate to balance the budget. The QDR requirement (echoed in national military strategy) is comprised of three broad and open-ended elements: shaping the international environment, responding to the full spectrum of crises, and preparing now for an uncertain future. The related goal of full spectrum dominance outlined in *Joint Vision 2020* is also a task of boundless proportion.

Despite an ambitious strategy and visionary requirements, spending levels have declined. Military cuts have been an essential part of the administration plan to balance the budget because defense outlays amount to half of all discretionary spending. In constant terms, defense spending is down 30 percent from Cold War levels, and procurement has dropped by 45 percent. The Armed Forces have declined by 20 percent from the base force level of the last administration in terms of active duty personnel as well as active component combat brigades, ships, and tactical air wings.

To marshal assets to support an expansive strategy in times of fiscal constraint, the Clinton administration has sought traditional elixirs: allies, technology, and defense reform. Unfortunately these solutions do not meet the need. Our allies in Europe and Asia remain critically dependent on U.S. military capabilities while America

continues to be ambivalent toward allied efforts to assume a larger security role within their regions. Technological so-

lutions are costly and introduce risk in an environment of asymmetric threats. Reform initiatives, such as streamlining procurement and rightsizing infrastructure, languish under bureaucratic inertia and domestic political agendas.

Thus current strategic ends and available means remain mismatched. This disconnect is not uncommon and reveals the degree of risk involved in strategy. But current strategy breaks down in two respects: the risk has become unacceptable and, more importantly, in failing to link ends and means, the strategy does not inform priorities and tradeoffs to assist in risk management.

## Dubious Heritage

The strategy-resource mismatch is a legacy of the Cold War. Its first aspect was the hegemonic strategy adopted by the United States after World War II. America came out of that conflict

militarily preeminent and consolidated its role as a world power by constructing what one former Secretary of State has called "a global liberal economic regime."<sup>1</sup>

But as recounted by John Gaddis in *Strategies of Containment*, Washington did not always devote sufficient resources to support its superpower role. He depicts cycles in which various Presidents pursued asymmetric containment with defense strategies such as New Look under Eisenhower and détente under Nixon. Defense assets were deliberately reduced and risks increased even in the face of the monolithic Soviet threat. Cold War security requirements were not fully underwritten even when higher cost symmetric approaches were adopted, like flexible response under Kennedy, since the United States relied on nuclear deterrence to offset conventional disadvantages.

Extended deterrence was another aspect of Cold War strategy that resulted in the mismatch. Our strategy was initially affordable because of overwhelming nuclear predominance, but it became increasingly expensive when the emphasis shifted to conventional forward defense in response to Soviet nuclear forces in the late 1950s.

As the nuclear posture of the Soviet Union increased, so did U.S. forward deployments. By the mid-1980s some 450,000 Americans were permanently stationed ashore in both Europe and the Pacific. Even this expensive posture, combined with the threat of nuclear response, was not our entire deterrent. One key ingredient was sheer political will and declaratory bravado, another element that exceeded tangible budgets.

The third aspect of Cold War strategy was the unprecedented size of the peacetime military. Both the cost and influence of the Armed Forces contributed to an unaffordable strategy. As Samuel Huntington pointed out in *The Soldier and the State*, two facets of the professional military ethic are the emphasis on the magnitude and immediacy of perceived threats and the relentless need to enlarge and strengthen the force. The influence of the military on strategy during the Cold War, given both its ethic and substantial economic and political impact on domestic affairs, inclined the Nation toward a budget-busting defense posture.

Moreover, the size and capability of the Armed Forces throughout the Cold War fueled what has been called the tyranny of means. For most of this period, particularly after the Vietnam War, the United States maintained a world-class military, trained and equipped with advanced weaponry and capacity for unparalleled power projection. Essentially it was too capable not to be employed in pursuit of hegemonic interests yet insufficient to fully accomplish them.

**the strategy-resource mismatch  
is a legacy of the Cold War**

VE-Day parade in Red Square, 1965.



AP/Wide World Photos

## the end of the Cold War has brought about a repeat of history

The fourth aspect of the Cold War legacy is reflected in program budgeting and acquisition. In search of ever-greater technological advances, and compounded by inefficiencies in procurement practices, defense planners had a systematic bias toward overestimating weapons performance and underestimating life cycle costs. This so-called discipline gap led the Pentagon to produce fewer or less capable weapon systems than stipulated by the funding level. By not providing the budgeted force structure, which was inadequate to implement a hegemonic strategy, dysfunctional planning exacerbated the mismatch.

### Future Prospects

Emerging trends will perpetuate the ends and means mismatch. Two important trends are instability and globalization—including economic interpenetration and the revolution in information technology—by heightening the significance of distant events and accelerating their overall impact. As one writer commented, “One awkward corollary of being a global superpower is that anything anywhere in the world involves at least a tenuous tie to some strategic interest.”<sup>2</sup>

The end of the Cold War has brought about a repeat of history, including crisis and conflict in the nonindustrialized world. These areas will undergo most of the growth in world population, leading to the migration of predominantly young people to urban centers. There, social ills such as disease, overcrowding, unemployment, and crime will be exacerbated, overwhelming inefficient governments. Conflict will breed under these abject living conditions, fueled by cheap and ample conventional weapons and exploited by desperate, ambitious leaders. The resulting conflicts will spread across failed states and produce refugees, displaced persons, and human rights abuses.

Moreover, threats to vital U.S. interests remain, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology as well as the specter of terrorism and cyberwar. In response, complex and expensive programs for missile defense, the militarization of space, and the protection of critical infrastructure will compete for finite defense resources. Also affecting vital interests are the uncertain futures of the brittle and illegitimate regimes in the friendly Gulf states, shifts in the dynamics of power in Asia, and the ever-present question of Russia.

Not only will such risks require greater assets than are likely to be available, but expansive perceptions of the threat tend to intensify. “Each time the United States pushes its security interests



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Fighters over northern Germany, 2000.

outward," one observer noted, "threats to the new security frontier will be apprehended."<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the domestic scene, two trends likely to sustain the mismatch are demographic shifts and political consensus. Compared with the end of the Cold War, minorities are projected to grow from 25 to 35 percent of the national population by 2020, with the proportion of those who are foreign-born or second-generation forecast to increase from 40 to 55 percent. With so many people with foreign ties, political constituencies may be more attuned to international affairs. Also, Americans aged 65 and over will be the fastest growing segment, estimated to move from 12 to 17 percent. The graying of the population will exacerbate constraints on discretionary outlays, which in turn will compete with defense budgets.

More importantly, there is a domestic consensus firmly in favor of a major national role in world affairs. This is underscored by the convergence of competing political groups in support of proactive hegemony. Compare, for example, the neoconservative veterans of the Reagan era who still advocate activism on the world stage and neo-liberals who promote intensified engagement and shaping, under the rubric of preventive defense.

A contrary position, that the Nation should share substantial responsibility for maintaining the global liberal economic regime, requires unacceptable constraints on our freedom of action and is out of step with the political mainstream, which wants to maintain the role as world leader. As one analyst concluded, "Any suggestion that

the United States is not measuring up to its obligation to enforce the rules might call into question its claim to be the hub from which the spokes of the international system extend."<sup>4</sup>

An unavoidable consequence of hegemony—particularly in a crisis-prone environment—is a continuous pattern of prolonged intervention, often for limited objectives. For the United States, deterrence will be less efficacious because of the nature of intra-state conflict and a growing array of nonstate-sponsored threats. Moreover, inconsistent policies in the past have weakened deterrence and thus "made it extremely difficult for the United States to achieve its objectives without actually conducting military operations."<sup>5</sup>

Intervention for limited objectives goes against the grain of the American way of war, which is identified by strategies of annihilation in support of unlimited war aims. This tradition is marked by conflicts that feature military absolutism and autonomy in which overwhelming force is used to defeat a particular enemy and achieve unambiguous objectives.<sup>6</sup> Restricting military absolutism or autonomy in future wars is likely to result in greater tension between civilian and military leaders in planning and executing interventions. The tension will increase as the military is persistently asked by its political masters to do more than it can afford, in missions at odds with professional ethics, and with operational and tactical level decisions made under close civilian oversight.

Relations will be further soured by competition among the services for scarce resources and the difficulty of obtaining increased funding absent a classic threat on the horizon.

JFQ

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Schwarz, "Why America Thinks It Has to Run the World," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 277, no. 6 (June 1996), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile War in Kosovo: Summary Briefing to the USAF/XP Strategy Forum* (1999), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the Twenty-First Century?" *World Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1998), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization," *The National Interest*, no. 56 (Summer 1999), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Barry M. Blechman and Tamara C. Wittes, "Defining Moment: The Threat and Use of Force in American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 114, no. 1 (Spring 1999), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. xxii.